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ABSTRACT

This paper posits that students who are in intercultural communication classes on a university level benefit from models of experiential learning. Assuming the pedagogical theory that communication study that is passive, noninteractive learning is less successful and less satisfying than proactive, interactive learning, the paper discusses the intercultural communication class for teachers-to-be and business and professional students. The authors of the paper, working as instructors, consultants, and researchers in educational, business, and professional settings, agree with Edward Hall and others that culture and communication are one concept--inseparable from one another. The production, maintenance, and interpretation of culture is communication and communication is culture. Cultural conflict is inevitable. However, emergent discourse--participants' active and topical language culture--arises from conflict. The analyses of emergent discourse through self-perspectives, the perspectives of others, and the organizational contexts in which conflict occurs can lead to positive results on specific issues. The analysis can lead to an increased capability in students to be their own intercultural consultants as they interact with diverse others. Contains 179 references. (Author)

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Implementing Experiential Learning in the Higher Education Intercultural Communication Class

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Implementing Experiential Learning in the Higher Education Intercultural Communication Class

Abstract

This paper posits that students who are in intercultural communication classes on a university level benefit from models of experiential learning. Assuming the pedagogical theory that communication study that is passive, noninteractive learning is less successful and less satisfying than proactive, interactive learning, the authors discuss the intercultural communication class for teachers-to-be and business and professional students.

The authors, working as instructors, consultants, and researchers in educational, business, and professional settings, agree with Edward Hall and others that culture and communication are one concept -- inseparable from one another. The production, maintenance, and interpretation of culture is communication and communication is culture.

Cultural conflict is inevitable. However, emergent discourse -- participants' active and topical language culture -- arises from conflict. The analyses of emergent discourse through self-perspectives, the perspectives of others, and the organizational contexts in which conflict occurs can lead to positive results on specific issues. The analysis can lead to an increased capability in students to be their own intercultural consultants as they interact with diverse others.

Implementing Experiential Learning in the Higher Education Intercultural Communication Class

Students who are in intercultural communication classes on a university level benefit from models of experiential learning. Communication study that is passive and noninteractive learning is less successful and satisfying than proactive and interactive learning. This paper discusses intercultural communication classes and students who are teachers-to-be and business and professional students. The authors argue that a model of learning that is proactive, interactive, and experiential is productive for higher education intercultural communication classes.

Conflict arises from diversity in educational settings (e.g., private and public higher education, and graduate schools) and in business and professional settings (e.g., for-profit private companies, nonprofit organizations, governmental agencies, and health organizations). Intercultural conflict should be considered a prime stimulus for students-learning-to-learn rather than a problem that must be solved. The conflict should be considered as an emergent discourse that is available for self- and other-analyses. Such analyses can result in understanding and amelioration of conflicts arising from different cultural commitments of the individuals involved in conflict in education and business and professional organizations.

Intercultural Communication Courses in Higher Education

The purposes for and types of intercultural communication courses vary from campus to campus. Intercultural communication classes in universities across the U.S. have a multitude of purposes and directions. The content classes, both lower-division and upper-division, can be any of the following: surveys of diverse cultures, studies in the theories of intercultural communication, training for individuals going to different countries, university service courses for a general education requirement, required courses for public school teachers, business and professional communication course, organizational communication courses, and so forth. The various needs of the classes produce a wide selection of pedagogical methods and applications.

The format and pedagogical style of intercultural classes are also diverse. For instance, some rely on one or more texts; others have no text; some have a research orientation; others choose to examine in detail one culture by the entire class; others study a general text with or without a reader; and some encourage each student to study a specific culture. The teaching methods used are also varied: (1) lecture, (2) discussion, (3) group-directed, and (4) combinations of these and other presentation styles.

In reality, one cannot generalize the purposes or types or pedagogical styles of the intercultural communication class.

However, this paper suggests that experiential learning opportunities improve the effectiveness of study, regardless of the specific type or style of the specific intercultural communication course.

Experiential Learning

Lewis and William (1994) define experiential learning: "Experiential education first immerses adult learners in an experience and then encourages reflection about the experience to develop new skills, new attitudes, or new ways of thinking" (p. 5). Although not a new concept (Dewey, 1971/1938), interest in experiential learning has increased. Several researchers and experts in various disciplines and professional settings (e.g., communication, education, business, psychology, and so forth) have recently projected different models of experiential learning (Association for experiential education, 1991; Burnard, 1991; Evans, 1992; Hoberman, 1992; Hutchings, 1988).

Lewis and Williams (1994) discuss four of the shifts in perspectives that have lead to support of experiential learning models. First, cognitive, humanistic, social, and constructivist learning models stress the importance of meaning formation utilizing learners' living experiences. Second, because many colleges and universities have had a noticeable influx of nontraditional aged students, instructors have had the opportunity to incorporate the work, family, and living experiences of adult students into an experiential model. Third,

(a) an increase in outcome-based evaluation of student learning by accrediation organization, (b) demands from employers for observable and specific skills, and (c) student demands for "practical" learning have contributed to instructors revealing the purpose of the subject matter and the theory-knowledge of classes. Supported by accreditation insitutions and the corporate world, students are aking their questions loudly and emphatically: Why do I need to know this? How will this help me get a job? How will I have a better life if I learn this? Will I ever use this skill/knowledge?

The many models of experiental learning are characterized by certain common characteristics. They encourage investigation and open-mindness. They provide "practice" with prior acknowledged skills and behaviors. Questions and multi-perspectives are promoted. The practical applications of cognitive and theoretical material have been determined to be important and necessary for many students, but particularly, future teachers and business and professional students.

Teaching Teachers

The media and scholarly research reports have chronicled dramatic changes in the United States demographics during the last portion of the Twentieth Century. Educators and the general public have become aware that many of the Anglo mainstream-directed curricula and teaching styles of the past are not suitable for today's U.S. classrooms in K-12 or in higher

education. Dropout rates in K-12 and higher education (Kunisawa, 1988; L. Shaver, 1994b; "Social Justice," 1990; Spring, 1994) reveal that nonmainstream populations are at the greatest risk in the traditional classroom. As the media continue to report social and economic disasters resulting from an ever-growing uneducated population of young people, the issue of effective education for teachers in a multicultural classroom is once again receiving attention. (L. Shaver, 1994a).

Some states have required a course in intercultural communication as a part of the certification process for some time, but as the issue of changing population needs continues to be the focus of education research, more states are requiring such training for classroom teachers and school administrators (L. Shaver, 1994a,b; Shaver, Isaacson, McKay, O'Connor, & Powell, 1994b). Oklahoma has required such a course for over ten years, bute Indiana has just begun requiring a course in culture for both elementary and secondary teacher certification. Other ways of approaching cultural-based teacher/administrator training is illustrated by a newly developed Master of Science for principals at Indiana University South Bend (IUSB). This degree is a result of an initiative supported by the Lilly Corporation with Dean Marcia Sheriday of the Division of Education IUSB. Four area public school corporations (School Leadership, 1994) and professors from IUSB. University professors in education, psychology, business, communication, and other areas worked with

teachers and school administrators to develop a certification/ graduate degree that included diversity as the touchstone of all areas of the degree program. I worked with a task force on diversity for several months. After goals and objectives were determined, the teachers and administrators on the four teams developed curriculum in communication, community context, knowledge of teaching and learning, and leadership/organization. The communication curriculum was developed with diversity at its core (Shaver, Isaacson, McKay, O'Connor, & Powell, 1994).

Communication faculty are sometimes asked to serve as consultants or contributors to interdisciplinary programs such as the one at IUSB. These faculty are often given a mandate to develop courses in intercultural communication that are specifically designed for teacher/administrators-in-training. More often, communication faculty are asked to include special sections on the multicultural classroom in their ongoing intercultural courses. Because teachers-to-be are often enrolled in general intercultural communication classrooms, the professors in such classes have particular mandates that are determined by the communication department, the professor's particular pedagogical and research goals, and the needs of the students. The population in the classroom can be restricted to communication majors/minors, open to the general university as an elective or as a general education requirement, or some combination of these purposes.

As an example, the upper-division intercultural communication class at Indiana University South Bend (IUSB) does not have prerequisites. The following are one or more characteristics of our students:

1. They are from a variety of departments.
2. Some have had no experiences with representatives of other cultures.
3. Other students have varying interest levels in studies of culture.
4. They may be communication majors or minors
5. Some have had 1 or more communication classes as electives.
6. Others will have had no communication courses
7. Several students are international, primarily Asian.
8. Many have never left the two state area of Michigan and Indiana.
9. There are transfers from other universities.
10. There are also graduate education students.

For most of these students, the class is not a general education requirement. It may be, however, an upper division level choice for specific sequences or a requirement for some communication majors and minors.

Because our midwestern state university has many students who are not traditional age students, the mixture of graduate and undergraduate students does not dramatically impact the class.

However, in the South Bend area, elementary and secondary teachers, in general, reflect the profile of the mainstream population. That is, they are generally Anglo and members of the middle class. More often than not, they are women in their late twenties or early thirties who are single parents (IUSB Yearly Student Report, 1994).

In many public organizations, the professional is different than the client by gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. These differences result in problems in communication and in disagreements about mutual goals of the interaction. Misunderstandings often occur during the process of negotiation of means to obtain the goals. Because public school educators, like the physicians and patients in Indian Health Service, a federal health care bureaucracy, are different from their students by gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Glenn (Shaver), 1991). The differences between physician/patient or teacher/pupil can be hindrances to satisfactory interactions and successful professional outcomes.

Futhermore, the life experiences of many teachers-to-be have neither prepared them to deal with the problems in a multicultural classroom nor given them the background to anticipate the needs of their students. While the traditional profiles of teachers describe people who are empathetic with their students, it is erroneous to assume that such empathy is a "natural" development in teacher training. For these reasons,

the intercultural communication class that has teachers-to-be should include a curriculum with an experiential learning component, as should classes for all other students. Research has revealed that there are substantial benefits from the implementation of an experiential model of learning, particularly in relationship to learning that is associated both with empathy toward other cultures and motivations for cultural changes in attitudes and beliefs (Association for Experiential Education, 1991; Burnard, 1991; Evans, 1992; Foeman, 1991; Hoberman, 1992; Hutchings & Wutzdorff, 1988).

Classes for teachers-to-be can provide a "learning laboratory" by allowing the cultural perspectives of the students themselves to emerge. By providing time for self-perspective analysis, the students achieve the capability of meta-analytic reasoning. The meta-communication of self-talk and the interactions of others encourage students to varying levels of self-reflexivity. The attaom,emt of self-reflexivity gives the teachers-to-be a "tool box" that enables them to assess self and cultural conflict with others. Such assessment and analysis can lead to understanding specific conflict. Shaver and Shaver (1992) refer to such an incident as a "site of conflict" (O'Hair, Friedrich, & L. Shaver, 1995). Pratt (1990) refers to these interactions as "contact zones." The significance of the specific contact zone or the site of conflict is that it reveals the perspectives of self and others.

Proactive communication experiences provide teachers-to-be the skills necessary for communication that is strategic and flexible but not tactical (i.e., manifpulative). A tactic is defined as an expedient method for managing others. The expedient action is often aggressive and negative as opposed to assertive and positive. Just as the connotative meaning and the use of tactical communication is most often associated with the planning and execution of military goals, strategic is defined as a plan of action or the skill of using stratagems in politics and business. A more positive term -- strategic communication -- refoers to a course of study that allows students to develop constructive communication skills.

In such classes, teachers-to-be are not manipulated to accept desired intercultural insights but are given opportunity and time to accept diversity as an everyday reality. Hopefully, the strategic approach will then be present in those teachers' own classrooms and another group of students will have the opportunity and time to accept diversity as an everyday reality.

Most teachers will satisfy a certification requirement in a general intercultural communication class. But only the reinforcement of the classroom dialogue through technology-assisted experiential learning modules or in-class experiential activities will result in positive experiences and that can lead to the acceptance of a culturally sensitive perspective by teachers-to-be.

Business and Professions Students

Business and professional persons face daily challenges in management and work relationships and in professional/client encounters that result from diversity conflict. People who are different from each other can provide interesting and rich experiences for each other and their organizations, but these differences can also create tension. Students are increasingly aware of cultural changes, but many have not related their classroom experiences to real-life experiences.

The changing patterns of U.S. population have been well documented by researchers, media, government initiatives and reports, and special interest groups. Studies reveal that by the year 2000 5/6ths of the new entrants to the work force will be women and minorities. Other figures reveal that the U.S. labor force grows by about 30% to 40% annually due to the arrival of foreign nationals (Curry, 1993; Nobile, 1991; Solomon, 1993).

Current research has established that in the workplace, the effects of perceived differences strongly affect management and work relationships. Understanding the definition of diversity and its impact on the workplace is helpful to students and critical to their successes in their various careers (Axtell, 1994; Curry, 1993; Edwards, 1994; Gungler, 1992; Harlan, 1992; Jenner, 1994; Naisbitt, 1994; Nobile, 1991; Solomon, 1993; Sera, 1992; Tunks, 1992).

Students are awed by the changes in their living and working

worlds' cultural patterns. In the 1970s, demographers made (then) startling predictions that Anglo males soon would be the lowest represented population group in the workforce and that more women would work outside the home than not. Others predicted that business and professional organizations would be transformed into transnational companies; would hire more part-time employees than full-time employees; and would adopt an employment philosophy whereby employees would work at many companies and change careers several times in their career life. While some did not take these ideas seriously, the predictions now are accepted as realities today. Business and professional students face an unstable and constantly changing workplace (Axtell, 1994; Edwards, 1994; Gugler, 1992; Harlan, 1992; Jenner, 1994; Naisbitt, 1994; Sera, 1992; Tunks, 1992).

Students find the changes in their worlds unsettling and know that the styles of management of their supervisors and their own style of management will be dramatically impacted by the demographic changes within the U.S. and the increase of business interactions here and in other countries with people who are culturally different. While the class that teaches teachers should clearly establish that the goal is to teach the student to teach in order for that teacher-to-be to direct successfully a diverse classroom, classes with business and professional students need to focus on the challenges of globalization and cultural changes/differences so that students will accept their

need to "learn-to-learn." Such continued learning is necessary so that they will be able to manage, to be managed, and to interact successfully with people who are culturally diverse.

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1. These topics and the activities are also found in O'Hair, Friedrich, & Shaver (1995); and additional explanation of the theory of intercultural conflict is in P. Shaver & L. Shaver (1992b).

2. Included in this bibliography are cited and uncited references that have been informative to the authors.